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ABSTRACT

The overrepresentation of African American students in special education programs is of national concern. Research has identified a higher special education placement rate of African American male students with Caucasian teachers. Yet the current U.S. teaching force includes only 4 percent African American teachers. To identify factors predictive of African American students enrolling in special education preservice teacher preparation programs, African American students were surveyed at 25 historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) nationwide and 8 Missouri public universities and colleges that offered special education teacher preparation programs. For students enrolled in HBCUs, the major factors were a desire to reverse the overrepresentation of African American students in special education programs, a desire to advocate for special needs students with the same cultural background, and the inspiration of a special needs person. For students in Missouri universities and colleges, the decisive factors were the inspiration of a special needs person and the feeling of being called to be a special educator. Role models and the financial advantages of forgivable loans, scholarships, and teaching were not factors in the decision-making process for either group. Recommendations are offered for recruiting African American students into special education preservice teacher preparation programs. Five tables present survey results. (TD)

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PREDICTIVE FACTORS FOR THE ENROLLMENT OF AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION PRESERVICE PROGRAMS

The need for highly qualified diverse special educators has reached crisis proportions. Every state reported a serious shortage of special education classroom teachers during the past school year (NCPSE, 2000). There is an alarming racial disparity between students and teachers in our nation's schools that threatens to impact the quality of education for all students. Currently nine out of ten teachers are Caucasian nationwide, while students of color represent 37% of elementary and secondary school students (Alliance for Equity in Higher Education, 2000). The racial composition of the teaching staff and the disparities in representatives of Caucasian and African American males in special education were studied in ten United State cities, Atlanta, Cleveland, Miami, Chicago, Houston, Detroit, New York, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and San Diego (Herrera, 1998). A relationship was found between the number of African American male students placed in special education and the number of Caucasian teachers in the school system. Currently enrollment in teacher education programs is identified as over 80% Caucasian and 16% minority (Alliance for Equity in Higher Education, 2000).

The United States is significantly more diverse than it was at the beginning of the last century. In 1999, the United States Census Bureau reported that 72% of the total population was Caucasian.

Table 1

Percentage of Total United States Population

	2000	2020	2040	2050
Caucasian	72	64	56	53
Asian & Pacific Islanders	4	6	8	9
African American	12	13	13	13
Hispanic	12	17	22	24
Native American	1	1	1	1

It is projected that by 2060, the country will be evenly divided between a white and non-white population (Chinn, 2000).

This severe shortage of teachers of color deprives students of color of role models and denies all students the benefits of a diverse educational experience. If the nation does not invest in educating more teachers of color then the racial, cultural, and economic gaps in society will widen and endanger the future (Alliance for Equity in Higher Education, 2000).

Research Design

This research study was undertaken to identify which factors were predictive of African American students enrolling in special education preservice teacher preparation programs. The research design was based on survey research. A questionnaire was developed based on current literature review and interviews of professors employed in preservice teacher preparation programs. A panel of experts reviewed the questionnaire for content, clarity of presentation, ease of administration, and avoidance of biased questions. The draft questionnaire was revised in agreement with the reviewers' comments. The finalized instrument contained 22 questions on a 5 point Likert scale with 1 representing a decisive factor in the decision, 2 representing a minor factor in the decision, 3 representing a factor in the decision, 4 representing a factor that was not a contributing factor in the decision, and 5 representing a factor that was not available or applicable in the decision. On the instrument there was an area to identify any

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additional factors not already mentioned. The demographic data identified year and major in college as well as first generation college student.

Target Populations

Two populations, national and state, were identified for the study. The national population was Historically Black Colleges/Universities (HBCUs) with an undergraduate preserve special education teacher preparation program. The state population was public and private universities/colleges with undergraduate preservice special education teacher preparation programs within the state of Missouri.

Sample Populations

Each HBCU was contracted to verify the presence of an undergraduate preservice special education teacher preparation program and the name and address of the appropriate contact person. Of the 136 HBCUs only 24 self - identified as having an undergraduate preservice special education teacher preparation program. The name and address of a contact person at each HBCU was acquired.

A total of 23 universities/colleges were contacted in the state of Missouri. Only 19 self-identified as having an undergraduate preservice special education teacher preparation program. A contact person was identified at each university/college.

A letter requesting the names and addresses of African American students at each university/college was forwarded to each contact person. The intent was to develop a database of students and then randomly select a sample population for HBCUs and Missouri. A large number of the universities/colleges stated that in agreement with university/college policy they could not or desired not to give out students' names and address. The original research design call for a random stratified sample of 9 students from each university/college from the following categories:

3 African American students admitted to the special education program, age range of 18 - 20
3 African American students admitted to the special education program, age range of 20 - 23
3 African American students admitted to the special education program, age of 24 plus

The research design was altered based on the inability to get a listing of students. The contact person at each HBCU or Missouri university/college identified 9 African American students as listed above. Several of the universities/colleges in Missouri notified the researcher that they did not have a total of 9 African American students in their preservice special education teacher preparation program, so they self-selected to not participate in the research study. In the state of Missouri 11 universities/colleges did not have 9 African American students enrolled in special education preservice teacher preparation programs. The final sample populations were 25 HBCUs and 8 Missouri public universities/colleges.

Response Rates

Each contact person was provided with 9 self addressed pre-franked surveys to distribute to 9 students that they identified. The surveys were designed to that the participants could staple or tape the survey closed and drop it in a mailbox. This allowed for confidentiality of responses. A follow-up mailing occurred one month after the first mailing. The sample of HBCUs had a 33% response rate while the sample of Missouri's universities/colleges had a 25% response rate.

Findings

Table 2 portrays the factors HBCU students identified as decisive in their decision to enroll in preservice special education teacher preparation programs. Table 3 portrays the combination of decisive and minor factors identified by students enrolled in HBCUs.

Table 2

Decisive Factors for HBCU Sample Population

Item Number	Item	% of Response
20	My desire to advocate for special needs students who share my cultural background	58.5
18	The inspiration of a special needs person	54
21	My desire to reverse the over-representation of African American students in special education programs	50

Table 3

Combination of Decisive and Minor Factors for HBCU Sample Population

Item Number	Item	% of Response
20	My desire to advocate for special needs students who share my cultural background	66.5
21	My desire to reverse the over-representation of African American students in special education programs	61
18	The inspiration of a special needs person	59
2	Encouragement from a parent, family member or close friend	58
17	The availability of jobs in special education	57

Table 4 portrays the factors students enrolled in Missouri universities/colleges identified as decisive in their decision making process. Table 5 portrays the combination of decisive and minor factors identified by students in the Missouri sample.

Table 4

Decisive Factors for Missouri Sample Population

Item Number	Item	% of Response
18	The inspiration of a special needs person	83
19	My feeling of a calling to be a special educator	83
2	Encouragement from a parent, family member or close friend	67

Table 5

Combination of Decisive and Minor Factors for Missouri Sample Population

Item Number	Item	% of Response
19	My feeling of a calling to be a special educator	100
18	The inspiration of a special needs person	83

The findings included all returned surveys. None of the surveys were removed because of missing data.

Conclusions

The mission of many HBCUs is providing excellent educational opportunities for a diverse student population. Out of the 136 HBCUs only 24 currently have undergraduate preservice special education programs. Frequently, the special education program is housed in the College or Department of education rather than as a separate department. Only 17% of HBCUs are currently preparing special educators. A national concern exists regarding the over-representation of African American students in special education programs. Research by Herrera (1998) has identified a higher special education placement rate of African American male students with Caucasian teachers. Yet the current United States teaching force is composed of only 4% African American teachers. Participants (50%) from HBCUs in this study identified item 21, "My desire to reverse the over-representation of African American students in special education programs", as a decisive factor in enrolling in preservice special education teacher preparation programs. Closely related to over-representation of African American students in programs is item 20, "My desire to advocate for special needs students who share my cultural background". This item was a decisive factor for 58.5% and a combination factor, decisive and minor, of 66.50% of responding participants enrolled in preservice special education teacher preparation programs at HBCUs. It may be possible that African American students who self select to attend HBCUs and enroll in teacher preparation programs are more concerned with advocating and over-representation. This is a question for further research. This research study can only identify these two factors as important factors in the decision making process in selecting special education teacher preparation programs.

Another factor for participants enrolled in HBCUs is item 18, " The inspiration of a special needs person". This is a decisive factor for 54% and a combination factor, decisive and minor, for 59% of the participants. This life experience can not be replicated in recruitment materials. This experience can not be created or controlled. This study can identify it as a factor in the decision making process.

For 20% of the respondents, item 1 "The presence of African American special education faculty members at my college/university", was not a factor in their decision. This can be linked to items 13,"The portrayal of African American teachers in television series or in movies", which for 18% of the respondents was not a factor in their decision. This study appears to indicate that a role model is not a factor in the decision to enroll in special education preservice teacher preparation programs.

Also, item 5, " Knowledge of forgivable loans and/or scholarships", was not a factor in their decision for 19% of the respondents. For 18% of the respondents, item 14, "The salary and fringe benefits package available to special education teachers", was not a factor. Item 7, "Full or partial tuition scholarships provided by my college/university for special education majors", was not a factor for 10% of the respondents. It appears that the financial aspects of college and teaching were not a factor for 19% - 10% of the respondents.

In contrast to the HBCUs, the students in Missouri's universities/colleges did not select item 20 as a decisive factor in their decision to enroll in special education teacher preparation programs. For 83% of the Missourians the decisive factor is item 18, "The inspiration of a special needs person". The combination factor, decisive and minor, for 100% of the Missouri respondents is item 19, "My feeling of a calling to be a special educator". Item 19 is a decisive factor for 83% of the respondents. These results are in conflict with the HBCU results. It is difficult to draw conclusions based on the small state sample. In addition, comparing national and state

populations may not be accurate because of a number of conflicting variables, such as life experiences of individual students, economic situations, local environments, etc. This research study can identify that for Missouri African American students enrolled in preservice special education teacher preparation programs that two decisive factors in the decision making process are the inspiration of a special needs person and the feeling of a calling to the profession.

Recommendations

An intensified effort to increase African American students' enrollment in special education preservice teacher preparation programs must be begun, especially in the state of Missouri. To increase the enrollment recruitment efforts must focus on the decisive factors identified by the respondents. Recruitment materials developed nationally for the purpose of increasing African American student enrollment in special education preservice teacher preparation programs should focus on the benefits of pursuing a career as a special educator to advocate for other African American students and to reverse the over-representation of African American students in special education programs. The financial advantages of forgivable loans and scholarships, and teaching are not a factor to be included in the recruitment materials. The issue of role models is not a factor in the decision making process and therefore, should not be in the recruitment materials.

Recruitment materials developed for use in the state of Missouri should reflect the inspiration of a special needs person and the feeling of a calling to be special educator. Once again, the financial aspects of college and teaching are not a factor that needs to be in the materials based on this research. Role models are not a factor in the decision so it does not need to be included in the recruitment materials.

Additional research in the area of decisive factors needs to be completed.

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